



The Association of Directors of Public Health Consultation Response

Revitalising High Streets

Objectives and Scope

In this [inquiry](#), the [Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee](#) is looking at the action needed to revitalise England's high streets.

The inquiry will examine the proliferation of “unwanted” retail and services – such as new betting shops, vape shops and fake barbers – and the impact they have on high streets and community pride. The committee will be looking at different approaches to high street regeneration, such as design codes, street furniture, and pedestrianisation, and explore the effectiveness of local council powers, such as High Street Rental Auctions, Compulsory Purchase Orders and the Community Right to Buy.

The inquiry will scrutinise the Government's measures to support the high street. In particular, the committee will assess the impact of changes to business rates on high street businesses, and the Government's [Pride in Place Programme](#), which it says will provide up to £20m to hundreds of areas over the next decade.

About ADPH

ADPH is the representative body for Directors of Public Health (DsPH), and is a collaborative organisation, working in partnership with others to strengthen the voice for public health, with a heritage which dates back over 160 years. We also work closely with a range of Government departments, including [DHSC](#) and [UKHSA](#), as well as the four CMOs, NHS, devolved administrations, local authorities and national [organisations](#) across all sectors to minimise the use of resources as well as maximise our voice.

ADPH aims to improve and protect the health of the population by:

- Representing the views of DsPH on public health policy.
- Advising on public health policy and legislation at a local, regional, national and international level.
- Providing a support network for DsPH to share ideas and good practice.
- Identifying and providing professional development opportunities for DsPH.

ADPH response

Revitalising high streets

The role of public health

- The built environment (including homes, transport, places of education and places of work and leisure) is a fundamental determinant of health and wellbeing across the life course.

- High streets are a key part of this and directly shape community wellbeing by acting as central hubs for health services, transport links, green spaces, retail and food.ⁱ
- Health in all Policies (HiAP) is an approach that considers and integrates health implications throughout decision-making across all sectors, recognising that decisions impacting health are made far beyond the health system. A HiAP approach must be taken to revitalising health streets.
 - This includes the use of tools such as Health Impact Assessments in early design phases, embedding local health, wellbeing, and equity into design decisions, and supporting healthier populations as well as economic growth.
- It is also crucial that Directors of Public Health and their teams are central to planning and resourced adequately to support the planning process.
- The updated [National Planning Policy Framework](#) has real potential to support healthier places.
 - The revised framework contains a number of encouraging updates, including a strengthened focus on health inequalities as a key consideration in planning and decision making.
 - We urge the Government to reconsider including 'fast food outlets' in the NPPF. In the absence of its inclusion, we urge Government to commence work to explore the Use Class Order to support regulation fast food outlets without delay.

Health harming industries on high streets

- Unhealthy commodity industries often target their products towards the most disadvantaged communities, which includes through the clustering of retail and service outlets in high streets in the most deprived neighbourhoods. This contributes to the higher levels of obesity, gambling, and alcohol related harm observed in the most deprived areas.
- For example:
 - In England, fast food outlets are disproportionately concentrated in deprived and minority ethnic neighbourhoods.ⁱⁱ
 - Land-based gambling remains a significant threat to public health as it is highly accessible and often clustered in more deprived areas.ⁱⁱⁱ
 - Off-licence alcohol outlets have also been found to cluster in more deprived locations.^{iv}
- Alongside expanding planning powers as outlined above, an important way to reduce health-harming industries on high streets is adding public health as a licensing objective in relevant legislation. It is also crucial that there is adequate resourcing for councils to enforce licensing.

Green space

- The revitalisation of high streets should consider how green space can be embedded into planning, ensuring that local populations have equitable access to these spaces.
 - Green spaces provide opportunities to exercise, socialise, and reduce air and noise pollution.^v
 - These spaces are essential for promoting mental health, wellbeing, and community cohesion, and should be embedded in town planning for inner-urban, edge, and rural sites alike.
 - Green spaces are less common in more deprived areas which is problematic because proximity and access to green space greatly impacts its use.

Active travel

- Active travel and its benefits should also be considered in the revitalisation of high streets.
 - Active travel strengthens people's connection to local communities^{vi} in addition to its significant impact on physical and mental health.^{vii}
 - These health outcomes will strengthen local regeneration and contribute to economic development^{viii}, particularly in rural areas where improving connectivity will boost economic growth.^x
- Active travel infrastructure should be co-produced with public health teams and local communities to ensure suitability for its residents and achieve its intended vision to increase movement.

Examples of embedding public health

Gateshead

- There is growing evidence that planning levers to restrict unhealthy food outlets can support healthy communities.
 - In 2015 Gateshead Council decided to create new planning policies to restrict new fast-food outlets near schools, in areas with an existing high density of fast-food outlets or where childhood obesity rates were above 20%.^{xi} This approach reduced the density of fast-food outlets by around 13 per 100,000 people, and the proportion of fast-food outlets compared to other types of food outlets by around 14%.^{xii} Further research found that in the most deprived areas of Gateshead, which also had the most fast-food outlets before the ban, there was a 4.8% decrease in the number of Year Six children who were recorded as overweight or obese, compared to other areas.^{xiii}
- However, commercial lobbying undermines progress on revitalising high streets. In December 2023, an investigation by The Times revealed that KFC had used “aggressive tactics” against councils prioritising children's health. KFC had challenged at least 43 English councils over their planning policies restricting new hot food takeaways, successfully overturning local efforts in more than half of the cases.

Walsall

- In its 2025 [Public Health Annual Report](#), Walsall Council outlined how it is embedding health into the revitalisation of its town. Its regeneration programme is underway via the [Walsall Town Centre Framework](#), which is upheld by six strategic objectives that highlight the importance of diverse and accessible places to promote wellbeing. Successes include:
 - Improvements to the connections between bus and train stations, promoting active travel, with plans to build upon this by developing a canal bridge and creating more green spaces.
 - The development of community spaces, including an adult learning centre that brings over 800 learners into the town centre, and other spaces such as a youth hub.
- The council has also developed its [Walsall Borough Council Plan](#), which incorporates health into local strategy, including using planning to manage the clustering of health-harming outlets, and supporting residents into employment.
- It is important to note that this regeneration programme has been backed by sufficient funding, with £1.5 billion being dedicated through major Government funding streams.^{xiv}

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- ⁱ Royal Society for Public Health. Streets Ahead. 2025. Available from: https://www.rsph.org.uk/media/filer_public/f5/d8/f5d812ad-67e7-404a-a164-30a882ffb5f4/streets_ahead_report.pdf [Accessed September 2026]
- ⁱⁱ The Health Foundation. Inequalities in concentration of fast food outlets. 2024. Available from <https://www.health.org.uk/resources-and-toolkits/data-tools/evidence-hub/inequalities-in-concentration-of-fast-food-outlets> [Accessed September 2026]
- ⁱⁱⁱ Gambling Commission (2025). Gambling Survey for Great Britain - Annual report (2024): Official statistics - Headline statistics. [online] Gambling Commission. Available from: <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/report/gambling-survey-for-great-britain-annual-report-2024-official-statistics/gsgb-annual-report-2024-headline-statistics> [Accessed September 2026]
- ^{iv} [Do ‘environmental bads’ such as alcohol, fast food, tobacco, and gambling outlets cluster and co-locate in more deprived areas in Glasgow City, Scotland? - PMC](#) [Accessed September 2026]
- ^v The Health Foundation. Relationship between access to green space and health [Internet]. 2023. Available from: <https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/surroundings/relationship-between-access-to-green-space-and-health> [Accessed September 2026]
- ^{vi} Cooper C, Fone D, and Chiaradia A, Measuring the impact of spatial network layout on community social cohesion: A cross-sectional study, International Journal of Health Geographics, 2014, vol 13. [Accessed September 2026]
- ^{vii} Flint E and Cummins S, Active commuting and obesity in mid-life: cross-sectional, observational evidence from UK Biobank. Lancet Diabetes Endocrinol, 2016, vol 4(5): pp.420-35. [Accessed September 2026]
- ^{viii} Hafner M, Yerushalmi E, Phillips W, Pollard J, Deshpande A, Whitmore M, et al. The economic benefits of a more physically active population: An international analysis. RAND Corporation; 2019. [Accessed September 2026]
- ^{ix} Hafner M, Yerushalmi E, Stepanek M, Phillips W, Pollard J, Deshpande A, et al. Estimating the global economic benefits of physically active populations over 30 years (2020–2050). British Journal of Sports Medicine [Internet]. 2020 Dec 1;54(24):1482–7. Available from: <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/54/24/1482>. [Accessed September 2026]
- ^x Reardon L, Benson M. The role of transport in improving access to opportunities [Internet]. POST. 2025. Available from: <https://post.parliament.uk/the-role-of-transport-in-improving-access-to-opportunities/>. [Accessed September 2026]
- ^{xi} Gateshead Council. Hot food takeaway supplementary planning document. Gateshead: Gateshead Council; 2015. Available from: <https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/media/1910/Hot-Food-Takeaway-SPD-2015/pdf/Hot-Food-Takeaway-SPD-2015.pdf?m=1599656142873>. [Accessed September 2026]
- ^{xii} NIHR Applied Research Collaboration. Research shows that restricting new fast-food outlets can reduce levels of childhood obesity. Available from: <https://arc-nenc.nihr.ac.uk/news/putting-the-brakes-on-fast-food/>
- ^{xiii} Xiang H, Goffe L, Albani V, Akhter N, Lake AA, Brown H. Planning policies to restrict fast food and inequalities in child weight in England: a quasi-experimental analysis. Obesity. 2024;32(12):2345-2353. doi:10.1002/oby.24127 [Accessed September 2026]
- ^{xiv} Walsall Council. Health and Wealth: Two Sides of the Same Coin. 2025. Available from: <https://www.walsallintelligence.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2026/03/Director-of-Public-Health-Annual-Report-2025.pdf> [Accessed September 2026]